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*An Ode for the  
Shelley Centenary*

BY

Charles G. D. Roberts





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*A V E:*

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*PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, 1792—1892.*

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*“Thine was a love that strives and calls  
Outcast from home,  
Burning to free the soul of man  
With some new life. How strange, a ban  
Should set thy sleep beneath the walls  
Of changeless Rome!”*

—BLISS CARMAN.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

ORION ; AND OTHER POEMS. (*Out of Print.*)

IN DIVERS TONES. (*Boston : D. Lothrop Co.; and Montreal : Dawson.*)

THE CANADIANS OF OLD : A Romance, translated from the French of de Gaspé. (*New York : D. Appleton & Co.; Toronto : Hart & Riddell.*)

THE CANADIAN GUIDE BOOK. (*New York : D. Appleton & Company.*)

POEMS OF WILD LIFE : A Compilation. (*London : Walter Scott.*)



# AVE:

AN ODE  
FOR THE CENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF  
PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY,  
AUGUST 4, 1792.

BY  
CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS.

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TORONTO:  
WILLIAMSON BOOK COMPANY.  
1892.

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## AVE:

*An Ode for the Centenary of Shelley's Birth.*

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### I.

O tranquil meadows, grassy Tantramar,  
Wide marshes ever washed in clearest air,  
Whether beneath the sole and spectral star  
The dear severity of dawn you wear,  
Or whether in the joy of ample day  
And speechless ecstasy of growing June  
You lie and dream the long blue hours away  
Till nightfall comes too soon,  
Or whether, naked to the unstarred night,  
You strike with wondering awe my inward sight,—



II.

You know how I have loved you, how my dreams

Go forth to you with longing, though the years  
That turn not back like your returning streams

And fain would mist the memory with tears,  
Though the inexorable years deny

My feet the fellowship of your deep grass,  
O'er which, as o'er another tenderer sky

Cloud-phantoms drift and pass,—  
You know my confident love, since first, a child,  
Amid your wastes of green I wandered wild.

III.

Inconstant, eager, curious, I roamed ;

And ever your long reaches lured me on ;  
And ever o'er my feet your grasses foamed,

And in my eyes your far horizons shone.  
But sometimes would you (as a stillness fell



And on my pulse you laid a soothing palm),  
Instruct my ears in your most secret spell ;  
And sometimes in the calm  
Initiate my young and wondering eyes  
Until my spirit grew more still and wise.

IV.

Purged with high thoughts and infinite desire  
I entered fearless the most holy place,  
Received between my lips the secret fire,  
The breath of inspiration on my face.  
But not for long these rare illumined hours,  
The deep surprise and rapture not for long.  
Again I saw the common, kindly flowers,  
Again I heard the song  
Of the glad bobolink, whose lyric throat  
Pealed like a tangle of small bells afloat.





v.

The pounce of mottled marsh-hawk on his prey ;  
 The flicker of sand-pipers in from sea  
 In gusty flocks that puffed and fled ; the play  
 Of field-mice in the vetches ;—these to me  
 Were memorable events. But most availed  
 Your strange unquiet waters to engage  
 My kindred heart's companionship ; nor failed  
 To grant this heritage,—  
 That in my veins for ever must abide  
 The urge and fluctuation of the tide.

vi.

The mystic river whence you take your name,  
 River of hubbub, raucous Tantramar,  
 Untamable and changeable as flame,  
 It called me and compelled me from afar,  
 Shaping my soul with its impetuous stress.



When in its gaping channel deep withdrawn  
Its waves ran crying of the wilderness  
And winds and stars and dawn,  
How I companioned them in speed sublime,  
Led out a vagrant on the hills of Time !

VII.

And when the orange flood came roaring in  
From Fundy's tumbling troughs and tide-worn caves,  
While red Minudie's flats were drowned with din  
And rough Chignecto's front oppugned the waves,  
How blithely with the reflux foam I raced  
Inland along the radiant chasm, exploring  
The green solemnity with boisterous haste ;  
My pulse of joy outpouring  
To visit all the creeks that twist and shine  
From Beauséjour to utmost Tormentine.



VIII.

And after, when the tide was full, and stilled  
    A little while the seething and the hiss,  
And every tributary channel filled  
    To the brim with rosy streams that swelled to kiss  
The grass-roots all a-wash and goose-tongue wild  
    And salt-sap rosemary,—then how well content  
I was to rest me like a breathless child  
    With play-time rapture spent,—  
To lapse and loiter till the change should come  
And the great floods turn seaward, roaring home.

IX.

And now, O tranquil marshes, in your vast  
    Serenity of vision and of dream,  
Wherethrough by every intricate vein have passed  
    With joy impetuous and pain supreme  
The sharp fierce tides that chafe the shores of earth



In endless and controlless ebb and flow,  
Strangely akin you seem to him whose birth  
    One hundred years ago  
With fiery succour to the ranks of song  
Defied the ancient gates of wrath and wrong.

x.

Like yours, O marshes, his compassionate breast,  
    Wherein abode all dreams of love and peace,  
Was tortured with perpetual unrest.  
    Now loud with flood, now languid with release,  
Now poignant with the lonely ebb, the strife  
    Of tides from the salt sea of human pain  
That hiss along the perilous coasts of life  
    Beat in his eager brain ;  
But all about the tumult of his heart  
Stretched the great calm of his celestial art.





XI.

Therefore with no far flight, from Tantramar  
And my still world of ecstasy, to thee,  
Shelley, to thee I turn, the avatar  
Of Song, Love, Dream, Desire and Liberty ;  
To thee I turn with reverent hands of prayer  
And lips that fain would ease my heart of praise,  
Whom chief of all whose brows prophetic wear  
The pure and sacred bays  
I worship, and have worshipped since the hour  
When first I felt thy bright and chainless power.

XII.

About thy sheltered cradle, in the green  
Untroubled groves of Sussex, brooded forms  
That to the mother's eye remained unseen,—  
Terrors and ardours, passionate hopes, and storms  
Of fierce retributive fury, such as jarred



Ancient and sceptred creeds, and cast down kings,  
And oft the holy cause of Freedom marred  
    With lust of meaner things,  
With guiltless blood, and many a frenzied crime  
Dared in the face of unforgetful Time.

XIII.

The star that burns on revolution smote  
    Wild heats and change on thine ascendant sphere,  
Whose influence thereafter seemed to float  
    Through many a strange eclipse of wrath and fear,  
Dimming awhile the radiance of thy love.  
    But still supreme in thy nativity,  
All dark, invidious aspects far above,  
    Beamed one clear orb for thee,—  
The star whose ministrations just and strong  
Controlled the tireless flight of Dante's song.



XIV.

With how august contrition, and what tears  
Of penitential unavailing shame,  
Thy venerable foster-mother hears  
The sons of song impeach her ancient name,  
Because in one rash hour of anger blind  
She thrust thee forth in exile, and thy feet  
Too soon to earth's wild outer ways consigned, —  
Far from her well-loved seat,  
Far from her studious halls and storied towers  
And weedy Isis winding through his flowers.

XV.

And thou, thenceforth the breathless child of change,  
Thine own Alastor, on an endless quest  
Of unimagined loveliness, didst range,  
Urged ever by the soul's divine unrest.  
Of that high quest and that unrest divine



Thy first immortal music thou didst make,  
Inwrought with fairy Alp, and Reuss, and Rhine,  
And phantom seas that break  
In soundless foam along the shores of Time,  
Prisoned in thine imperishable rhyme.

XVI.

Thyself the lark melodious in mid-heaven ;  
Thyself the Protean shape of chainless cloud,  
Pregnant with elemental fire, and driven  
Through deeps of quivering light, and darkness loud  
With tempest, yet beneficent as prayer ;  
Thyself the wild west wind, relentless strewing  
The withered leaves of custom on the air,  
And through the wreck pursuing  
O'er lovelier Arnos, more imperial Romes,  
Thy radiant visions to their viewless homes.





XVII.

And when thy mightiest creation thou  
Wert fain to body forth,—the dauntless form,  
The all-enduring, all-forgiving brow  
Of the great Titan, flinchless in the storm  
Of pangs unspeakable and nameless hates,  
Yet rent by all the wrongs and woes of men,  
And triumphing in his pain, that so their fates  
Might be assuaged,—oh then  
Out of that vast compassionate heart of thine  
Thou wert constrained to shape the dream benign.

XVIII.

—O Baths of Caracalla, arches clad  
In such transcendant rhapsodies of green  
That one might guess the sprites of spring were glad  
For your majestic ruin, yours the scene,  
The illuminating air of sense and thought ;



And yours the enchanted light, O skies of Rome,  
Where the giant vision into form was wrought ;  
    Beneath your blazing dome  
The intensest song our language ever knew  
Beat up exhaustless to the blinding blue !—

XIX.

The domes of Pisa and her towers superb,  
    The myrtles and the ilexes that sigh  
O'er San Giuliano, where no jars disturb  
    The lonely aziola's evening cry,  
The Serchio's sun-kissed waters,—these conspired  
    With Plato's theme occult, with Dante's calm  
Rapture of mystic love, and so inspired  
    Thy soul's espousal psalm,  
A strain of such elect and pure intent  
It breathes of a diviner element.



XX.

Thou on whose lips the word of Love became  
A rapt evangel to assuage all wrong,  
Not Love alone, but the austerer name  
Of Death engaged the splendours of thy song.  
The luminous grief, the spacious consolation  
Of thy supreme lament, that mourned for him  
Too early baled to that still habitation  
Beneath the grass-roots dim,—  
Where his faint limbs and pain-o'er-wearied heart  
Of all earth's loveliness became a part,

XXI.

But where, thou sayest, himself would not abide,—  
Thy solemn incommunicable joy  
Announcing Adonais has not died,  
Attesting Death to free but not destroy,  
All this was as thy swan-song mystical.



Even while the note serene was on thy tongue  
Thin grew the veil of the Invisible,  
The white sword nearer swung,—  
And in the sudden wisdom of thy rest  
Thou knewest all thou hadst but dimly guessed.

XXII.

—Lament, LERICI, mourn for the world's loss !  
Mourn that pure light of song extinct at noon !  
Ye waves of Spezzia that shine and toss  
Repent that sacred flame you quenched too soon !  
Mourn, Mediterranean waters, mourn  
In affluent purple down your golden shore !  
Such strains as his, whose voice you stilled in scorn,  
Our ears may greet no more,  
Unless at last to that far sphere we climb  
Where he completes the wonder of his rhyme !





## XXIII.

How like a cloud she fled, thy fateful bark,  
 From eyes that watched to hearts that waited, till  
 Up from the ocean roared the tempest dark—  
 And the wild heart love waited for was still!  
 Hither and thither in the slow, soft tide,  
 Rolled seaward, shoreward, sands and wandering shells  
 And shifting weeds thy fellows, thou didst hide  
 Remote from all farewells,  
 Nor felt the sun, nor heard the fleeting rain,  
 Nor heeded Casa Magni's quenchless pain.

## XXIV.

*Thou* heededst not? Nay, for it was not thou,  
 That blind, mute clay relinquished by the waves  
 Reluctantly at last, and slumbering now  
 In one of kind earth's most compassionate graves!  
 Not thou, not thou,— for thou wert in the light



Of the Unspeakable, where time is not.  
Thou sawest those tears ; but in thy perfect sight  
And thy eternal thought  
Were they not even now all wiped away  
In the reunion of the infinite day !

XXV.

There face to face thou sawest the living God  
And worshipedst, beholding Him the same  
Adored on earth as Love, the same whose rod  
Thou hadst endured as Life, whose secret name  
Thou now didst learn, the healing name of Death.  
In that unroutable profound of peace,  
Beyond experience of pulse and breath,  
Beyond the last release  
Of longing, rose to greet thee all the lords  
Of Thought, with consummation in their words.



## XXVI.

He of the seven cities claimed, whose eyes,  
 Though blind, saw gods and heroes, and the fall  
 Of Ilium, and many alien skies,  
 And Circe's Isle ; and he whom mortals call  
 The Thunderous, who sang the Titan bound  
 As thou the Titan victor ; the benign  
 Spirit of Plato ; Job ; and Judah's crowned  
 Singer and seer divine ;  
 Omar ; the Tuscan ; Milton vast and strong ;  
 And Shakspeare, captain of the host of Song.

## XXVII.

Back from the underworld of whelming change  
 To the wide-glittering beach thy body came ;  
 And thou didst contemplate with wonder strange  
 And curious regard thy kindred flame,  
 Fed sweet with frankincense and wine and salt,



With fierce purgation search thee, soon resolving  
Thee to the elements of the airy vault  
And the far spheres revolving,  
The common waters, the familiar woods,  
And the great hills' inviolate solitudes.

XXVIII.

Thy close companions there officiated  
With solemn mourning and with mindful tears ;—  
The pained, imperious wanderer unmated  
Who voiced the wrath of those rebellious years ;  
Trelawney, lion-limbed and high of heart ;  
And he, that gentlest sage and friend most true,  
Whom Adonais loved. With these bore part  
One grieving ghost, that flew  
Hither and thither through the smoke unstirred  
In wailing semblance of a wild white bird.





XXIX.

O heart of fire, that fire might not consume,  
Forever glad the world because of thee ;  
Because of thee forever eyes illumine

A more enchanted earth, a lovelier sea !  
O poignant voice of the desire of life,  
Piercing our lethargy, because thy call  
Aroused our spirits to a nobler strife

Where base and sordid fall,  
Forever past the conflict and the pain  
More clearly beams the goal we shall attain !

XXX.

And now once more, O marshes, back to you  
From whatsoever wanderings, near or far,  
To you I turn with joy forever new,

To you, O sovereign vasts of Tantramar !  
Your tides are at the full. Your wizard flood,



With every tribute stream and brimming creek,  
Ponders, possessor of the utmost good,

With no more left to seek :—  
But the hour wanes and passes ; and once more  
Resounds the ebb with destiny in its roar.

XXXI.

So might some lord of men, whom force and fate

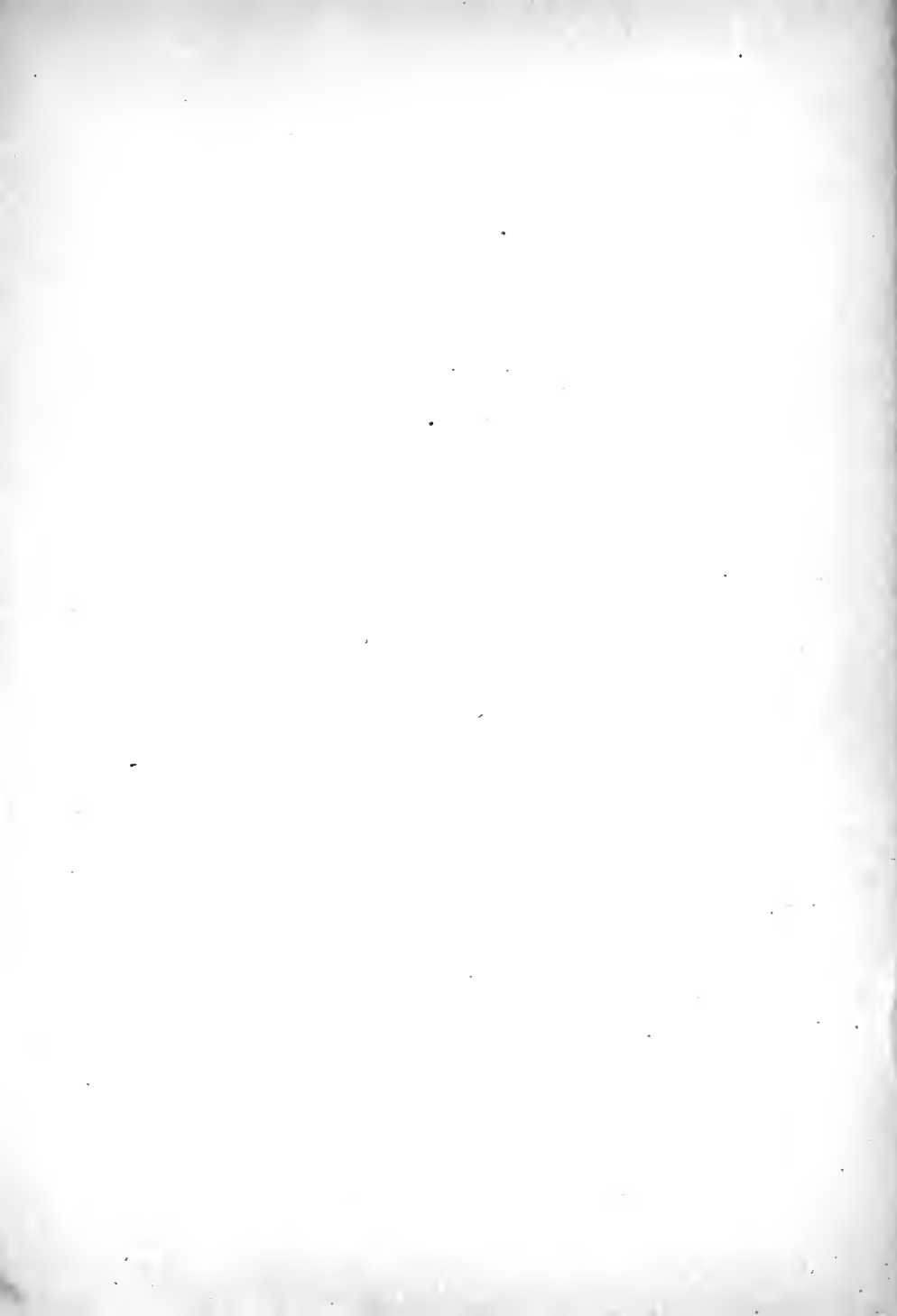
And his great heart's unvanquishable power  
Have thrust with storm to his supreme estate,

Ascend by night his solitary tower  
High o'er the city's lights and cries uplift.

Silent he ponders the scrolled heaven to read  
And the keen stars' conflicting message sift,

Till the slow signs recede,  
And ominously scarlet dawns afar  
The day he leads his legions forth to war.





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